

Remarks to the National Jewish Democratic Council November 2, 1995

Thank you very much, first of all, ladies and gentlemen, for that wonderful, wonderful welcome. Thank you, Jeff, for your introduction and for this beautiful Tzedakah box. Did I say it right—Tzedakah? [*Applause*] I'm very glad that you explained its significance, otherwise I was afraid that others would interpret it as something I might as well carry around, since whenever I see you, we seem to be—[*laughter*]. I was very moved by the story, and I'm very grateful. And that will have a happy place in the White House tonight.

Thank you, Monte Friedkin, for your work here; and David Steiner, Nancy Jacobson, Liz Schroyer, all the others who worked on this tonight; Senator Dodd and Senator Daschle and Congressman Gephardt, Congressman Frost, Congressman Bentsen; and to your wonderful honorees behind me.

You know, when Jeff said something about, look at this lineup, eight Jewish Senators, I thought he was going to say eight Jewish Senators and an Arkansas redneck. I didn't know what—[*laughter*]. I thought he was going to say, pick the person who's spoiling this lineup. [*Laughter*]

Let me say to all of you, I'm grateful to be here. I'm grateful to be here among friends. I'm honored to be here with these eight Senators whom you are honoring tonight. They richly deserve it. I know I don't have to tell you this, but if it weren't for them, for their steadfastness, for their belief in the values we all share, for their vision for the future, my work as President today in the midst of the battles that are going on in Washington would be not only difficult but indeed impossible.

I have never appreciated the wisdom of the Founding Fathers more than I have since this Republican budget has been working its way through Congress. They were really smart, those people who gave the President the veto. [*Laughter*] They understood the American system. They understood that there would be times in the history of our Republic, if we were going to last a very long time, when elections would produce unintended consequences and extreme conduct. And the President was given the veto because only the President has the responsibility

to look after all the people of this country and to look into the future, to imagine that future, and to keep the country on the right path. But none of that would be possible without these whom you honor tonight and their allies in the Congress. They reflect the very best contributions of Jewish-Americans to our way of life, as do the Jewish-American members of my Cabinet, Mickey Kantor and Secretary Reich and Secretary Glickman and Secretary Rubin and many others in our administration.

I am delighted, again, I want to say, that you're giving them the Hubert Humphrey Humanitarian Award, and I'm delighted that Attorney General Humphrey from Minnesota is here with you tonight to present it. And I thank him for his friendship and contribution.

I want to make a very brief argument to you tonight that I hope you will share with others throughout this country. When I sought the Presidency, I had a vision for what I wanted America to look like in the 21st century. I wanted our country to be a place with opportunity for everybody; a place where children had good schools and safe streets; where we had a clean environment; where we were all investing and growing together; where we made a virtue, not a problem, of our diversity, and we were coming together, not being driven apart; a country where we were still strong enough and good enough to lead the world to peace and freedom and democracy.

And I believe the only way to achieve that vision is to be open to new ideas consistent with the values that have made our country great and that make life worth living, both responsibility and opportunity; understanding the need of people not only for work but also for strong families; understanding that we are a community and we have responsibilities to each other, and that if we're going to make the most of our lives, we have to live by those responsibilities; understanding that standing up for America sometimes means doing what's unpopular in the short run because it's the right thing to do in the long run. These Members that you honor tonight and I have pursued for nearly 3 years now a very disciplined strategy to achieve that vision based on those values: pro-growth eco-

nomics; a modern Government that is smaller and less bureaucratic but still strong enough to advance the public interest; and a genuine attempt to write these mainstream values into the public policy of America.

And I leave it for you to make a judgment. But if you look at where we are now compared to where we were 3 years ago, we have 7½ million more jobs. Home ownership is at a 15-year high. There have been more new businesses started in America in the last 3 years than in any comparable period in American history. Our sales to other countries of our products and services is up one-third in only 3 years. The deficit has gone from \$290 billion a year to \$164 billion a year. As a percentage of our income, the United States of America has the smallest Government deficit of any industrial country in the world except Norway. That is the record that these people have made in the last 3 years, and I think it is a very good record.

Others may condemn big Government; these Democrats changed it. Your National Government has 163,000 fewer people than it did the day I was inaugurated. Next year, we'll have the smallest Federal Government since John Kennedy was President. As a percentage of our work force, it will be the smallest Federal Government since 1933—1933. Sixteen thousand pages of Federal regulation gone out of a total of 86,000.

But we have not given up on the responsibility of the Government to work with the private sector to try to sell America's products abroad, to try to create jobs here at home, to try to protect the environment and public health, to try to empower all Americans to do what they need to do to make the most of their own lives.

We have given you a modern Government. The era of big Government is over, but the era of good Government and strong Government cannot be over, because the public interest still must be advanced by the American people working together through their elected representatives. That is what these people have given you. And they are entitled to the gratitude and support of the United States of America.

Most important of all to me, this country is getting its act together. We're coming back together as a people. In the last 3 years, compared with 3 years ago, the crime rate is down, the welfare rolls are down, the food stamp rolls are down, the poverty rate is down, the teen preg-

nancy rate is down, the infant mortality rate is at an all-time low, child support collections are up 40 percent, and the delinquency rate of young people on student loans has been cut in half. That is what has happened in the United States in the last 3 years. And a lot of the policies that we adopted that they supported have contributed to that. This country is on a roll. We're moving in the right direction.

Do we have problems? Of course we do. Of course we'll all have problems as long as we're here on this Earth. The books of our faith tell us that. It is not given to people to be without problems. What are the problems of this time? Too many middle class people work harder without a pay raise and with increasing insecurity and no access to health care. Too many areas have not been affected by the economic recovery, and we have to find a way to get investment in enterprise into those areas; mostly they're in inner cities and isolated rural areas. And thirdly, even though all the social indicators look better, the truth is, a lot of our young teenagers are still in deep trouble. There are many places where the crime rate's going down but juvenile crime is going up. There are many places where drug use is going down but casual drug use by teenagers is going up. There are too many of our children still out there on the street raising themselves, frankly. And these are problems. But the answer to the problem is to do what we're doing and do more of it, to build on what we are doing, not to turn around and go in the other direction.

This country is a force for peace and freedom around the world. We have stood up for America's values and America's interests. We've been able to advance the cause of peace in the Middle East, in Northern Ireland, and God willing, our people are working as hard as they can now in Ohio for the cause of peace in Bosnia, to put an end to the horrible slaughter in that troubled land.

We have lessened the nuclear threat. We have fought terrorism and international drug running and organized crime. We are doing what can be done to stand up for this country's values. And yes, we were honored to be able to advance the cause of peace in the Middle East, but we're not done yet, and we have to keep working until the whole job is done. That's the only way that the people of Israel will ever be fully secure and the only way we will have ever finished our task there, when all the people are

at peace with each other and pledge to one another's mutual existence, security, and freedom. And I pledge to you, I will keep working until the job is over.

You must see this fight that we're in over the budget in the context of the brief remarks I have just made, in the context of what your values are and what your vision is for the 21st century. Let me tell you what this is not about: This is not about balancing the budget. And it is not about securing the Medicare program. That is not what this is about. This is about what kind of country we're going to be, what kind of people we are, and whether we're going to balance the budget in a way that is consistent with our mainstream values and consistent with our pro-growth economic policy. That's really what this is about.

And you know, I have had to resist this whether it's popular or not. It seems that the public is coming back our way now. But the truth is that it is impossible to know from one year to the next what will be popular in a time of great change. The fundamental reality is we are changing dramatically the way we live and work and relate to the rest of the world. In a time like this, you can't read the polls; you have to fall back on your values and be open to new ideas.

I've done a lot of things that made a lot of people angry, but I think I was right. The people that are in the majority now, when we passed our economic program, they said it would bring the country down. They were wrong. It lifted the country up. When we passed that economic program, we provided for lower cost college loans so young people like this could go to school at lower cost and pay their loans back on better terms. And they all opposed it because the organized interest groups were against it. But they were wrong, and we were right. It was the right thing for the long term of America.

When these people were in the majority in Congress and we became the first National Government ever to take on the organized interest groups to pass the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban, they were all against it. But we were right, and they were wrong. And the American people are better off now.

When we passed the crime bill that Jeff mentioned that put 100,000 police on the street—and by the way, we're ahead of schedule and under budget. And you talk to any major police

officer in this country in any city, and they will tell you that these police officers walking the street are not only catching criminals quicker, they are preventing crime. And after all, that is our objective.

And when we gave the cities some money in block grants that they now are in love with, we were attacked for giving cities the money and letting them decide how best to tell our children that they don't have to turn to a life of crime; they don't have to turn to a life of drugs; they can solve their problems in ways other than violence. They were excoriated, these people were, because we gave that authority to cities to give our little children something to say yes to instead of something to say no to. But they were wrong, and we were right. And the crime rate is going down, and we are saving lives today because of the work these people are doing.

The reason the budget fight is important is because it violates our values and it will undermine our future—what they are trying to do. I don't know about you, but my idea of America in the 21st century is not wrecking the Medicare program and being tougher on the oldest, the poorest, and the sickest senior citizens in this country. That's not my idea.

My idea of the 21st century is not devastating the Medicaid program so that 4 million poor children will be denied medical care, hospitals will close in rural and urban areas, teaching hospitals and children's hospitals will stop doing the work they are now doing. That's not my idea of the 21st century. And we are better than that. We do not have to do that to balance the budget, and it is wrong to do it to advance some ideological theory.

My idea of the America of the 21st century is not crippling the ability of the National Government to promote clean water and clean air, to protect the integrity of the American food supply, and to undermine the whole movement that we have made, all the progress we have made, to try to prove we could, in partnership, have economic growth and environmental protection. I believe if we give away the economy for short-term greed, we will all live to regret it. And these young children deserve better. We ought to give them a better 21st century than that.

My idea of the 21st century does not include raising taxes on working families that make less than \$27,000 a year in the most mean-spirited

part of all of their budget to give people in my income group and yours a tax cut. If they can figure out how to do it, fine—not by raising taxes on people with incomes of less than \$27,000. This Congress cut them, and we ought not to raise them.

There is no group in America devoted to the family more than Jewish-Americans. When we took office and we started our work, I had heard people condemn welfare forever and ever and ever. I had actually spent a lot of time in my life talking to people on welfare, and I knew that most of them hated it and were dying to get off. And one of the things that we have to do is to make work pay. So this Congress, that these people were in the majority in, that you honor tonight, voted to double the working family's tax credit so that we could make a simple statement: If you work 40 hours a week and you have children back at the house, we want you to succeed as a parent as well as as a worker. So we won't let the tax system put you into poverty even if you just make a little bit of money; we will use the tax system to lift you out of poverty. There will never be an excuse to choose welfare over work. And if you choose work, you can also be successful as a parent. That's what the working-family tax credit did. It was signed into law by Gerald Ford, lauded by Ronald Reagan as the best anti-poverty program in American history, expanded by George Bush. But because we doubled it, they are determined to cut it by more than we increased it. That is not my idea of the kind of America I want to live in in the 21st century. It is wrong. It is wrong. *[Applause]* Thank you.

I want you to think about this last point. A lot of you run companies that are doing very well and are positioned to do better in the 21st century. Is there a single, sensible American company on the edge of the global village of the 21st century that would cut its investment in research, in technology, in education, and in training? Of course not. Their budget cuts our investment in research, in technology, in education, and training. That is wrong.

Why would we make college education more expensive when we want more people to go? Why would we take 140,000 kids—or 45,000

kids—out of Head Start programs when we know young, poor kids need a chance to get off to a good start in school? Why would we do that? Why would we take college scholarships away from 150,000 young people when we need more people to go to college? Why would we cut the research budget of the United States when Japan, in the midst of a terrible recession, just voted to double their research budget? Why would we do these things?

It is my job to be true to our common values, to stand up for our economic interests, and to look down the road toward the future for the young people of this country. That is what this struggle is all about. This country is on a roll. The economy is going in the right direction. The Government has a lot of work to do, but it is changing in the right direction. And most important of all, the American people are getting their act together. There is a remarkable resurgence of personal responsibility for self, for family, and for community. It would be a travesty if we at this moment, when we have things going in the right direction, when all of the problems we have require us to keep going and do more in that direction, if we took a terrible veer off into the dark waters of some extremist theory that drug this country into more division, in more problems, in more heartache, and that compromised the future of these young people. There is no country in the world better positioned than the United States for the 21st century.

And so what I say to you tonight, these folks you're honoring and the person you helped to make President, we're going to do our best to give you that future. You rear back, relax, enjoy it, and help us fight for it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:59 p.m. at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. In his remarks, he referred to Jeffrey Hirschberg, chair, David Steiner, vice chair, and Nancy Jacobson, young leadership chair, Hubert H. Humphrey Award Committee; Monte Friedkin, national chairman, and Elizabeth Schroyer, acting executive director, National Jewish Democratic Council; and Hubert H. Humphrey III, Minnesota attorney general.